

The Dragon and His Boy

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Summary: After the battle with the Red Death, Toothless watches over his unconscious boy, wondering how he came to be here, knowing there's no place he'd rather be. COMPLETE.

The Dragon and His Boy

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A/N: This is me breaking down and giving in to the need to write a HtTYD fic and hopefully break my writing slump. Please review!

****The Dragon and His Boy****

The Night Fury now known as Toothless turns in a tight circle, mouth open, a glow building in the back of his throat, until he suddenly remembersâ€”he is In The House, which his boy's sire has made very clear (very loudly) is not an appropriate place to plasma blast a warm nest. Swallowing back his heat, Toothless sighs and finishes his circle, flopping down on the rough wood floor. His tail automatically wraps around him, shielding his eyes. He closes the fin with a snap when he realizes he can't see the bed and its motionless occupant.

Toothless knows the difference between night and dayâ€”dragons aren't stupid, as too many humans assumeâ€”but he also knows that humans place more importance on how many of these nights and days pass. Even Toothless knows that the boy has been still too long, trapped in a not-sleep. He gives a pensive sniff to the air, but the smells haven't changed. Pain, fear, sickness.

On the other side of the room, he can hear the thunderous snores of his boy's sire, the one who calls him demon. He isn't sure what 'bud' is, this thing his boy calls him, but he knows he prefers it to

demon. Or maybe he just prefers the way it's said. Bud is affectionate, pleasing. His boy's sire may have thanked him after the battle with the queen, but they haven't quite finished working out the terms of their truce yet.

As of yet, the dragon and his boy's sire prefer to stay on opposite sides of the room, opposite sides of the bed at best.

The sire's snores rumble unpleasantly, filling the spaces between the beams and echoing in the dragon's sensitive ears, but he much prefers the sire this way. Loud as he is, it isn't yelling. It isn't stomping around, giving orders, parceling out blame and burdens. Part of him still wishes he'd blasted the sire when he had the chance, in that cage they called a school, but he'd heard the fear and anguish in his boy, and so swallowed it back. It's a small thing, that wish, usually born of being around the loud sire too much, but the only way to escape him for a time is to leave his boy.

Even though it's safe to walk through the village now, he isn't going to leave his boy.

He snorts in spite of himself. His boy. He'd been so determined to kill this boy, even more determined to hate him, yet somehow— He scoots his tail underneath his chin, propping his head at an angle where he can see the form sprawled under the cloth covering. His green eyes narrow, until only a slit could be seen; this way he can watch his boy and sleep at the same time.

~*_section break_~*

The pain was shocking, completely unfamiliar. One second he'd been flying away from the remains of a fire tower, the next, he was falling, pummeled by rocks and rope. As best he could in the web that bound him, he prepared for a crash, folding his wings in tight against his body to protect them. All dragons crashed, he reminded himself.

From such a height, however, such a distance, it hurt more than he could ever remember. His entire body throbbed as he panted against the grass, struggling against the ropes. They held him tight. His head was caught at such an awkward angle that he couldn't even bite or flame. He was—

Shells and Flame, he was _trapped_.

A shudder ran down his body, rippling the flexible scales. He'd seen other trapped dragons, of course, in this and other villages like it. He'd helped trapped dragons escape, blasting at the ropes and sometimes metal that held them. It had never occurred to him that he'd be one of them.

Or that no one would be around to help.

He screamed in rage and fear and pain, then fell silent when he remembered the humans. One or more of them would be looking for their trap, to see what they had caught. It would be foolish to lead them straight to him. Whining deep in his throat, he rested his head against the grass. He couldn't even set that on fire to escape; it wouldn't burn long enough to set the rope aflame. He wished desperately for it to be night. Surely some dragon would come looking

for him. He'd been helping them, after all.

It was a foolish thought, and he knew it. He wasn't part of the nest. The dragons appreciated his help, but they had to worry about themselves.

He gave a great heave, trying to stretch his wings against the rope. If he could just snap it—he sank back, exhausted. No such luck. Whatever human had built this trap had either been very clever, or very lucky. At this point, he'd even be grateful for a Terrible Terror to make an appearance, obnoxious as those little wretches were. They could bite and flame and that would be enough, but no. He had to land in what seemed to be the only part of this island where there were no sheep, and so nothing for the dragons to pursue.

Closing his eyes, the Night Fury tried to prepare himself for the arrival of humans.

He tried to prepare himself for death.

When the human came, though, the sun high overhead, he wasn't expecting — what was this boy, exactly? He looked nothing like the other humans he'd seen, skinny and clumsy and talking to himself. The Night Fury heard him long before he saw him, galumphing through the woods without any care to predators. But then, the dragon sighed, on this island, humans were the predators. Why would he fear his own kind?

But then this skinny boy, stammering and shaking and raising his knife. The dragon crooned a goodbye to the clouds and the open sky and rested his head against the grass again, waiting for the shiny weapon to descend. Waiting—waiting—he irritably cracked open one eye to see what was taking the human so long. No dragon desires death; extending the torment was simply cruel.

To his shock, the boy backed away and looked at him, really looked at him. His shoulders slumped, and the dragon sensed something breaking, something fragile, something—something very final. He just couldn't smell what it was. The knife descended, but instead of piercing tough hide and scales it—

The dragon sprawled in the grass for a moment, disbelieving. The boy had cut him free? But this way the boy's trap! He could smell it! He rolled to his feet, shaking himself out. The boy watched him uncertainly, fearfully. He should kill him. He should blast him into a pile of ash so the boy couldn't do this to any other dragon, so the humans wouldn't have his skills at their disposal.

But the boy had also just saved him. Dragons didn't recognize debt, as such, but it was considered abominably rude to kill someone who had just spared your life.

Pouncing, the Night Fury pinned the terrified boy to the ground, claws to either side of that spasming throat, and roared directly into his face. He couldn't kill him—couldn't bring himself to be that rude—but that didn't mean he couldn't scare the smells right out of him. The boy's eyes rolled wildly with fear. Satisfied, the dragon bounded away, launching himself into the air.

And falling.

On the verge of panic, he launched again and managed to glide a short distance before crashing into a tree. What was wrong with him? Why couldn't he steer? He tried a third time, coasting over the edge of a drop off, then fell like a stone into a lake. He snorted and thrashed through the water to shore. His body ached from the stones and the long night in the unnatural position, but there was nothingâ€¦|.

He saw his tail and froze, staring at the tattered remnants of his left tail fin. One of the rocks must have punched right through it, dragging its ropes in its wake. Whining, he inspected the strips of hide and bone clinging to his tail, trying to nose the pieces back into place. Heat bloomed within his belly, chest, and throat as the panic grew. There was too much missing, too much broken. The Night Fury knew from watching other dragons, this kind of wound couldn't heal.

He was never going to fly again.

He shrieked his despair, past caring if the human heard him and returned, if it brought others. He didn't even care if the other dragons heard him, though he knew they were back at the nest now, giving the queen their spoils. He was never going to fly again. He was trapped in this cove until the humans found him and killed him. He'd never heard such sounds coming from his own throat before. He'd never been this devastated before, not even when the hunters killed his sire when he was just a nestling, not even when his dam returned, dying, from a hunt and scattered him and his sisters to the winds too young, just to protect them from the humans that would follow her blood trail back to her nest. Then, at least, there'd been a chance of survival along with the sorrow. Now there was nothing.

Inspecting the ruined tail fin again, he braced himself and got down to the grisly business of chewing away the remnants. He'd seen dragons die from not tearing away the dying flesh. It hurtâ€”shells and flame, it hurt!â€”but he wasn't about to die from anything other than the humans. If they wanted their Night Fury trophy, so be it, but he wasn't going to just give in and die. He'd take as many of them with him as he could. The dragon bit and tore, and when he'd pulled away as much of the ruin as he could, he scraped away the rest against a rough rock. It was harder than he'd thought to keep going; he just wanted the pain to stop. But he made himself continue, and when he'd sanded the nubs down to a smooth tail, he burned the hide to make it close, to protect it from the rot.

Exhausted, half-blinded from pain, he burned himself a warm nest in the grass and slept.

~*_section break_~*

"Toothless?"

His ears perk at the name. It takes a second longer to identify the voice as the screaming female, the Nadder's girl. The one who could have caused so much trouble for him and his boy. He hasn't quite made up his mind about her yet. Beneath the smell of her, he can smell the Nadder, and fish.

Fish?

He opens his eyes, shaking himself out of sleep, and looks over at her. The girl gingerly sets a wide basket of fish in front of him before backing away. "You haven't left; I figured you had to be hungry. Stormfly helped me catch them."

Stormfly. He blinks, then decides she means the Nadder. It's a good name for her, vain beast that she is. Though, he supposes she can't help being vain. It's just a Nadder's nature. He warily sniffs at the basket, noting mostly salmon and cod. No eel, thank the stars.

The girl perches on the end of the boy's bed, safely away from his injured limb, and studies him. Toothless can smell the pain on her, the worry, the fear. It spikes as she inspects the not-sleeping boy. Her hand shaking, she leans forward to brush the boy's shaggy hair out of his face. "I'm scared, Toothless," she whispers.

He finally starts eating the fish; she probably wouldn't be talking to him like this if she means to kill him. It's only after he's swallowed the first fish that he realizes how desperately hungry he is. How long has it been? He devours the rest, then sniffs and noses at the basket as if it can magically produce more.

The girl watches him with a small smile. "I'll bring you more tonight," she promises. "I'm sorry none of us thought of it. We'reâ€|well. There's a lot to adjust to."

Toothless snorts and shoves the empty basket away. He uncoils, stretches languidly, and prowls up to the bed to sniff at his boy. The sickness smell is less. The pain and fearâ€|the broken fear, the fear of the dragon in the trapâ€|remains. A pale hand moves in the edges of his sight and he jerks back.

The girl's hand remains in the air, fingers up, palm out, like his boy has offered so many times. "I didn't tell." Her voice is soft, full of a different kind of pain than his boy. He takes a breath, nose wrinkling. Guilt, sorrow. Anger. "I swear I didn't tell anyone."

He knows that; if she'd told, the humans would have come to his cove that night. The guilt is something older. He stares at her hand, debating his options. Sighing, he leans forward until his nose rests in the curve of her palm. Her fingers curl down, scratching gently, and he makes a pleased noise in spite of himself.

"He's going to wake up," she says fiercely, and he recognizes the determination he first saw when she came at him with her ax. He still can't decide if her reflexes were set to "Dragon: attack!" or if she was trying to protect the boy, however much she disliked him. Maybe that's why he's reluctant to trust her, the swift change of something so long held. He'd been smelling her on his boy from nearly the beginning, and the echoes of her were always angry.

Her fingers keep scratching, gradually growing bolder and moving up between his eyes. Her touch, hesitant and light, makes him miss his boy even more. "I have to go," she says eventually. "There's still a lot of rebuilding to do, and they need help getting the roof beams in place. Butâ€|I'll be back tonight, Toothless. I'll bring more fish. And I remember what Hiccup told me. No eel."

He nods and moves away, giving her space to stand and walk away. He's not sure where the boy's sire is. Probably out yelling at people. His back end drops to the wooden floor, his chin resting on the bed. It's uncomfortable, painful even, but he can see his boy so clearly. The cloth rises and falls with steady breaths. He's warmer than he should be, the inside warm that a dragon knows so well but in humans means sickness, but his leg smells clean. Not the rotting sickness. He thinks back to that first meeting, to that fragile something that broke in the boy when he couldn't kill a dragon, and wonders if this is similar.

Glancing to the entrance, he decides the girl is right. His boy will wake. But he doesn't think it will be today.

He shuffles to the side, his body closer to the bed, so he can see both door and entrance without turning. He can't make his boy wake up, but he can protect him while he's not-sleeping.

~~_section break_~~

The boy called him Toothless.

It didn't make much sense to the dragon—he clearly had teeth, after all. But it was a name the boy seemed comfortable with, and having never chosen a name for himself, the dragon didn't really mind all that much. If he answered to it, he got another chance to study this strange human.

And it meant he was closer to flying.

He'd wanted to kill this obnoxious human the first time he started messing with his tail—the tail HE ruined!—but the boy's curiosity and persistence had worn him down. The next thing he knew, something metal and leather was being buckled to his tail. For a moment he'd forgotten he couldn't fly, he just had to get away, so he'd spread his wings and launched—and for a few glorious seconds, he's tasted wind again. Of course it couldn't last. Humans could fashion new limbs for themselves, but they didn't work the same way. Why would a dragon be any different? He could look like he had a functional tail, but he'd never fly through the clouds again.

He'd reckoned without the boy's stubbornness and seemingly endless patience. No matter how many changes or tweaks, the boy didn't lose his temper. Trial after trial, model after model, and slowly boy and dragon drew closer to real flight. The boy's curiosity wasn't limited to fixing, either.

Toothless had never known there was a spot on his chin that could make him collapse and purr. He wasn't sure if this was something to be embarrassed about or not.

And the boy played. He'd never realized that humans knew how to play. They were always so angry. But the boy spun the light for him to hunt, and found him patches of dragon nip to roll in until he could barely remember how to flame, much less think. There were games of chase (sometimes when the boy wasn't expecting it), and pounce, and even wrestling matches that never ended well for the boy and somehow he was always eager for them anyway. Something about the boy's stubby fingernails felt better against his hide than any rock he'd ever found to rub against, though he wondered if that was just a bad

memory spread across all rocks, from when he'd had to scrape away his tail.

And there was flying. He couldn't believe the boy had managed it. The rig wasn't exactly comfortableâ€”sometimes the metal was too cold against his hide, and unwieldy, the leather heavy and awkwardâ€”but it worked. That first flight had been glorious. Terrifying, too, as flying hadn't been since the first time his dam nosed him out of their nest, but glorious. Even being dependent on the boy on his back to move his tail fin hadn't lessened the feeling of freedom that sang through him upon entering the sky once more.

He liked this unaccountable boy. He wasn't quite sure how it had happened. One day, trying to kill each other, and it didn't seem like long at all before the sound of his clumsy boy traipsing through the woods made his ears perk with excitement and anticipation. Maybe it was because this boy smelled different than any human he'd come across. Beneath the joy and curiosity and intelligence, sorrow and loneliness lay close to the bone. It was a part of him, Toothless thought, something that couldn't be excised. This boy's smells were built on always being something apart.

Toothless knew what that was like. He hadn't seen anything of his brothers or sisters since their dam sent them from the nest to save them. He didn't know if they any of them were still alive. No matter where he went, he couldn't seem to find anyone like him. He'd found nests and sanctuaries and breeding grounds, he'd seen dragons the people of this island couldn't even imagine, but he'd never found another Night Fury after leaving his nest behind. The other dragons tolerated himâ€”feared him, perhaps, though he'd never understood whyâ€”but he was kin, not family. That he felt no need to answer to the queen in the volcano nest just made him even more different.

That was what this boyâ€”his boyâ€”smelled like. Different.

But he could smell other dragons on him, too, even before that little pack of annoyances on their first flight. Well, at least they were a cute pack of annoyances, once they got their fish from the boy rather than stealing them from him. He'd earned those fish, by the stars. Flying after being so long grounded was exhausting, especially with the boy on his back struggling to do his part. He could smell a female iron-eater, a Gronkle they called themselves, and a female Nadder. There was a Zippleback, somewhere between male and female, or perhaps both, a tiny Terror, also female. Females tended to do better in captivity, he remembered, and he could smell the thick metal of their cages, too thick to melt through. There were whiffs of another, too faint, too indirect to make out clearly.

He and his boy communicated very well, he thoughtâ€”much better than he thought humans and dragons were capable ofâ€”but they didn't actually have a language. He couldn't ask this boy what he did with these other dragons.

But, as time passed, he could smell the fear and anger and despair decrease a little in those echo imprints of the other dragons. Whatever the other humans were doing to them, his human was decreasing their misery. That was unexpectedly important to him.

Gradually he was able to sort through those other human smells, as well. There was one that was fierce and angry, one that was fretful and cautious. There were two nearly identical that he eventually labeled as male and female, brash and obnoxious as two Terrors. There was another he didn't like, proud and stupid, with an undertone of coward. There was a smell that interested him, though, because it had echoes of his boy's. It was a smell of wood and metal, of protection. Of affection. He wanted to know what male owned that last smell.

When he got to meet that smell, and the new smell that belonged to his boy's sire, he cursed himself for ever thinking about it.

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A slam wakes him abruptly and he turns with a growl. The Gobber, the affectionate one with the missing limbs, gives him a lopsided smile. "Sorry," he whispers, which in the big smith is just shy of a yell. "Didn't mean to wake you, jes couldn't manage the door." His arm and hook are full of a leather wrapped bundle. As he stumps closer, his peg leg firm against the floor, Toothless sits up to inspect it.

The man obligingly sets it on the bed, unfolding the leather flaps. Knotted string, paper, a familiar-looking drawing stick, a block of wood, and a wickedly sharp knife sprawl across the leather. He gives the man a doubtful look.

"Oh, don't worry," the man chuckles, folding the cloth covering away from the boy. His ruined leg, still swathed in bandages, is exposed. "He'll never be happy wit a peg like mine. No, I'm workin on someat I think you both will like. Jes need the measurements."

But he doesn't reach for any of the things he's brought. Toothless watches curiously as he unwinds the bandages. A bent, little old woman who smells of more Terrors than anyone should is the one who usually does that, and the boy's sire always leaves the room when she does. The Gobber, the protective smell, manages the task with surprising agility and gentleness. His hook doesn't make him seem capable of delicacy.

He studies the revealed stump, the skin still tender and a little swollen around the seam. The dragon whines at the sight, guilt plaguing him, but the man with the ridiculous moustache looks over and smiles. "None of that," he chides. "You saved the lad; what's a leg to that? He'll adjust better'n most." His thick, blocky fingers move lightly over the seam, testing the skin. Long scrapes streak his knee up onto his thigh from where Toothless tried to get his first grip, biting too lightly and losing his boy as a result. The second time, he'd latched onto the leg with what he'd known was too much strength, but surely this boy who'd built him a new tail could build himself a new leg.

That doesn't stop the guilt, because that's never prompted by the sight of the leg cut off a little ways below the knee. The guilt comes from the small, fleeting thought that maybe his boy deserved it, for taking his tail. It's unkind, and he loves his boy, but he can't help the way that thought sometimes intrudes.

"Exactly the best place for it," The Gobber tells him. Unlike many in

the village, he talks directly to the dragons, confident of their intelligence and understanding. Toothless knows he isn't the only dragon to appreciate that. "Below the knee means he'll have better coordination. Well, for Hiccup. Lad's as clumsy as I've ever seen." He laughs again, and by now Toothless has been around enough humans to distinguish a fond laugh from a cruel laugh. The Gobber loves the boy as a sire wouldâ€"as the boy's true sire wants to and only sometimes managesâ€"and he loves even the parts that don't come together all that well. "An ankle's beyond my ken," The Gobber continues thoughtfully, and the dragon recognizes the same tone his boy gets when he's working his way out loud through a problem. "Might be I could get _some_ flexibility in there."

The man's eyes flick up to the smaller roof, the one under the big roof, the one that somehow also serves as a floor. The smells tell Toothless that his boy's bed is normally up there, in that other space, but he understands why they've brought it down. "I'll have to look there _and_ at the forge," The Gobber sighs. "No tellin where's he hid the plans for your tail."

Tail? Toothless' ears perk, and he tilts his head to convey his interest.

With a broad smile that sets his too-long rock tooth to wagging, The Gobber reaches out and gently scratches the dragon's chest with the outer curve of his hook. "You can't fly without 'im, he tells us, so it seems to me, you two need each other. I'd best make sure your rig works with his new foot."

Crooning happily, Toothless leans into the caress. Here is a human who understands his boy, and accepts the parts he doesn't understand. The girl might get there, eventuallyâ€"and he's of two minds about that eventualityâ€"but this man has always been there.

After another minute, The Gobber turns back to his task, finally picking up his tools to measure the leg and where it isn't but used to be. "The wood is for a model," he tells Toothless. "It'll help me figure out the best way to go, and so I don't have to keep taking measurements." He writes them down, his markings large and square and carefully spaced. "It isn't just physical, losin a leg," he says after a while. "Yer mind plays tricks on you. Makes you think it's still there. Makes you think you're less. Maybe it's other people that do that, more than the mind. It isn't easy to adjust. You'll help him."

Toothless nods attentively, watching his hands move around his boy's leg to shape the wood.

The man laughs suddenly, laughs until saltwater leaks from his eyes. He wipes the streams away ever so gently with his hook. "Don't mind me," he manages breathlessly. "Jes wonderin what I would have thought if someone had told me a few years ago I'd be talkin with dragons." He shakes his head in a wonderment Toothless has felt many times. "Losin a leg is never easy, but it may be the best thing to ever happen to him, after meetin you."

Toothless tilts his head again, confused.

"He proved to everyone he's a real Viking. He lost his leg savin all our lives, and makin us better, too. But people can forget. It's

easier for us to forget." He taps the less-tender skin above the boy's knee. "This means they'll never be able to forget. His life will be very different from here on out, and I can only think that's a good thing."

Toothless likes this human. He hopes to shells and flames he never has to carry him, because the man is uncomfortably big and fat, therefore heavy, but he likes him. And he's lost an arm and leg; he'll understand what the boy is going through, when he wakes. Toothless will always be willing to listen to his boy, but he thinks maybe humans need other humans to listen to them sometimes, because the humans can talk back.

When he finishes his measurements and model, The Gobber packs everything neatly away and pressed a new cloth pad against the end of the stump, where the stitches have mostly stopped leaking fluid. Toothless helps him wind the bandage, something that's hard to do with only one hand. Every time The Gobber needs to reposition his grip to get around another curve, Toothless carefully bites down to hold the fabric taut. He's learned this much from watching the old woman who's let herself be adopted by too many Terrors.

"I'll be back," The Gobber says after thanking him. "Keep watching our boy."

Our boy. Normally, Toothless isn't one for sharing, but he likes the sound of that. With this man, anyway, who doesn't resent the dragon's claim.

~*~_section break_~*~

He could feel the boy safe against his belly, hidden from curious, frantic, angry eyes. His wings folded over the unconscious boy, holding him close. Blood seeped warm against his hide. It wasn't his, though. It was his boy's.

The loud red man stepped forward through the mist-wreathed smoke, his progress stumbling and unsure. Toothless watched him through narrowed eyes. This was the man who called him demon. This was the man who chained him, trapped him more than the boy ever had. This was the man whose smells layered through so much of his boy's pain, inside all those fragile things inside him, the things that broke so easily. If just held his boy here, until after all the humans found a way to go back to their island, he and his boy could go elsewhere, just go. Somewhere with humans who could appreciate his boy. Maybe somewhere with no humans at all. His boy could, he thought, probably be quite happy surrounded by dragons.

Or maybe just the two of them, in no place at all, just traveling to see what the rest of the world had to offer. Two lonely creatures, different, out of place.

But his sensitive nose was swamped with the sire's fear, with his sorrow, with a pain older than he could name. It was from this pain, he realized, that so many of the wounds came, wounds that hurt the sire as much as the boy. The guilt was staggering.

Exhausted, Toothless lifted his head to stare at the man on his knees, and slowly revealed the boy clutched to his heart. The relief on the man's face could not be missed as he crawled forward to take

his son in his arms, cradling his limp form in massive arms, like he'd seen some human dams hold their nestlings.

"Thank you," the man said, reaching out a beefy hand to rest it against Toothless' head, "for saving my son."

Toothless made a noncommittal noise in response.

He just wished he could be sure he'd saved his boy. He was so still, and his heart was beating so slowly. The saddle rig bit into his shoulders, but he was too tired to move. He eyed the loud man—"none so loud right now"—and briefly wondered if he could let off a small enough plasma blast to hit him but not his boy.

It was the man missing parts that brought their attention to the boy's leg, and Toothless crooned low in his throat when he saw the extent of the damage. He knew he'd bit too hard, knew his teeth had scraped too far, but falling weight was harder to grip, especially when he couldn't fly on his own. He'd done his best, but his best—

From a few inches below the knee, all the way down to the ankle, the flesh had been stripped in ribbons matching Toothless' all too toothy pattern, exposing muscle and bone below. Just as he knew no dragon could have kept a tail like his, he knew no human could keep a leg like this. This sire couldn't accept his son as he had been; how could he ever accept him now that he'd have to work harder at the things that his sire wanted?

But those massive, deadly hands—"hands that had killed so many dragons over the years"—stroked his son's face, holding him to his chest and burying his face in that shaggy hair. The cheering humans couldn't hear what he said, but Toothless could.

He just wasn't sure what it meant.

~*_section break_~*

It's the steady series of stomps that wakes him. No matter how hard he tries, the sire can't seem to walk softly anywhere, much less in his own house. It drove the dragon crazy in the first few days, the vibrations quaking through the floor and onto his sensitive hide. Now, after far too much exposure to it, he just rolls his eyes and sits up to check on his boy.

He's still not sure where he and the sire stand with each other. It's been many nights and days since the death of the queen—"more than Toothless bothers to count, anyway"—and the humans are increasingly worried about the boy. The Gobber soothes nerves with mentions of 'mental shock' and 'his mind protecting itself from trauma' but even he carries the fear smell now, and he didn't before, at least not so much as everyone else who's come through the entrance. The sire no longer calls him demon, at least, though he'd not sure beast is much better.

Slowly, however, and with a very stumbling sort of communication, they've hammered out some basic compromises. Toothless will not plasma blast a nest In The House. Toothless will not roost upside down from a roof beam. Toothless will not expel his waste In The House. Toothless will not try to feed the boy like a nestling

(Toothless assigns In The House to this one, as well). In return, the sire will look before he stomps. The sire will not try to remove the dragon from The House. There are other pieces he's forgotten, at least until they come up again, but those are the big ones.

He's pretty sure those are the big ones.

The sire checks in on the boy through the day, but he only spends stretches of time with him after dark, as the rest of the village falls silent in the distance. Then he stokes the flames, pours himself a horn of mead, and settles into the big, worn chair on the other side of the bed to watch his son not-sleep. Sometimes he talks (though not to Toothless). More times he doesn't. And when the yawns come thick and fast and he can't stay awake any longer, he finally gets to his feet, pushes back his son's hair, and kisses his forehead, with the words Toothless always hears but can't quite understand.

"Don't follow your mother yet, son."

All but one day a week, he smells of sawdust and sweat from rebuilding the village. With no more raids to prepare for, they can make buildings with the expectation that they won't get burned down next month or next year. And they've been building for dragons. Roosts and nests and platforms, some kind of feeding place that somehow strikes Toothless as undignified whenever he chances to see it through the window.

Toothless watches the sire settle into the rough chair, horn in his hand. His elbow rests on one of the arms, his cheek against his fist as though it's the only thing holding up. He falls asleep in the chair sometimes, when he's been working hard.

He isn't sure what to make of the family. Most dragons are raised by their dams until they're old enough to leave the nest. Some of are raised by groups of dams, and he knows Nadders are especially communal, all the females looking after the nestlings whether they bred that year or not. Some very few, Night Furies among them, are raised by both dam and sire, but he's never heard of any dragon being raised only by its sire, like his boy has been. He suspects the dam is dead, from the pain in the sire, but why did another female not raise the nestling as her own? The answer is probably something hopelessly human, but it pricks at him sometimes, when he sees something in his boy that doesn't seem to belong to anyone in the village. Not learned, but inherited, from an unknown dam.

"I told him I was proud of him."

Toothless' ears perk up, and he slowly turns his head to stare at the sire. The sire still studies the boy.

"That can't possibly make up for all the times I told him I wasn't."

Something human. But something very important.

~*_section break_~*

Something is different about his boy's smell. Something a few steps away from dreaming, away from the not-sleep that has kept him still

for what he's learned to call weeks.

Sitting up, Toothless draws as close as he can to the bed, sniffing at his boy's face. The eyelids twitch. Eagerly, Toothless keeps sniffing, crooning encouragement to the slowly waking boy. Sitting back, he finally gives vent to an impatient growl.

The boy's eyes open.

The boy's eyes open!

Half-crawling onto the bed, the dragon gently nudges his boy's face. The green human eyes slowly focus on a face that's probably too close. "Hey, Toothless," he says weakly.

Ecstatically, Toothless nudges and licks, making the boy laugh. He moves further onto the bed—"that's one of the rules he was forgetting: no dragons on the furniture"—until his leg accidentally rests on his boy's stomach. His boy sits up with a cry, arms wrapped around his belly.

It's been weeks since he's eaten, Toothless realizes. He must be hungry.

Shells and flames, _he's_ hungry.

But he's awake!

Unable to contain his joy, but knowing his boy is still too delicate to play like they usually do, Toothless bounds around the room, not caring if things get knocked over. The sire can deal with it. His boy is awake!

And confused. Back when he was a secret, Toothless being In The House would have gotten them both in a great deal of trouble. Or death. A great deal of death, at least for the dragon.

He's up on a beam when his boy begins to move from the bed, and Toothless jumps down immediately. His boy hasn't realized yet. He sits back, hunched in on himself, watching as the boy finally looks down at his legs and sees—not what he was expecting. He stares at the place where his leg used to be, where The Gobber's creation now rests, a construct of wood and metal and leather with the boy's legging tied to the wood.

Toothless doesn't try to sift through the maelstrom of emotions he can smell. The Gobber warned him of this.

His boy stares and then, taking a slow, deep breath, swings both legs over the side of the bed. His boot rests on the floor first, followed a moment later by the The Gobber's foot. He doesn't try to stand up yet. Toothless sniffs expectantly at the metal peg. He can smell the Gobber on it, not just the physical smell of his sweat and effort on the device but in the affection and hope and good cheer that cling to it. He looks up to see how his boy is taking it.

And as far as he can tell, his boy isn't breathing.

He sits up a bit, breathing out to remind his boy how it's done. He has to do it more than once before his boy follows suit, staring at

him helplessly.

He's not sure why the sire has never been proud of his boy before this; he's stronger than anyone, human or dragon, he's ever seen. His boy immediately reaches for the post at the foot of the bed, pushing himself to his feet. At first all his weight rests on his natural foot. It takes a momentâ€”to gather, to think, he's not sureâ€”but then he limps forward a step, swinging the metal foot as though he's unsure of its weight. He stands, steadies himself, successful. Then he tries to lead with the metal foot.

Toothless shoves his broad head under his boy as he falls, catching him before his knobby knees can crack against the floor. He slowly pushes him to standing. He knowsâ€”and not just because The Gobber told himâ€”that it's important he not do this for his boy. His boy has to do this for himself. But he can help. He twists around so he can stand beside his boy, keeping his head where his boy can hold on. He won't try to carry him, but by the stars, he'll support him.

Together, the boy leaning heavily on his dragon, they walk slowly towards the entrance. Toothless can hardly keep himself still, from joy, from eagerness. He wants to see the look on his boy's face when he sees just how much his village has changedâ€”because of him. Together, the dragon and his boy walk forward to face the future.

Together, the dragon and his boy can face anything.

End
file.